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ABSTRACT

Little is known about how restructuring networks actually affect the cultures of school systems. This report examines the creation of an "island" of reform in a school district in northwest Ohio. The research emanated from the discovery of a new "island" in northwest Ohio called the Pathfinder Network. The group formed through like-minded educators coming together to address school problems. As the group evolved, Network principals and teachers observed that few colleagues outside of the group wanted to talk about innovation. This sense of isolation gave rise to a study that probed how central-office administrators, board members, and principal colleagues conceptualized systemic change. The research examined how cultural changes at a single school site affected or did not affect the system's culture. A focus group dialogue was initiated with network principals, elected district-level administrators, university faculty, and board members. Data from the dialogues were then used for semistructured interviews with superintendents, board members, central-office personnel, and principals in all districts of the Network. The findings unmasked the theories of organizational learning embedded within the culture of the local school systems and the defensive behaviors used by district members to sustain inert cultures. (RJM)

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Barriers to Excellence: The Culture of Silence in School Systems

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The early stages of school restructuring were often grounded in a concept of fundamentally changing *one school at a time*. As the idea gained credence, state and national networks formed so teachers and administrators could tackle complex problems in an atmosphere of flexibility, devoid of the prescriptions and compliance that constrained them within their district systems (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996; 1997). In their review of a wide variety of networks, Lieberman and Grolnick extolled the importance of networks for teachers and administrators "who need to be free to step outside of it [the school system] in order to consider ways to improve the very schools and systems within which they work" (1997, p. 209). Reports about successful networks conclude that these informal alliances supported democratic values, high degrees of inclusion, an ethos of egalitarianism, increased risk-taking, and high degrees of efficacy for solving complex issues (Blase & Blase, 1994; Conley, 1993; Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996, 1997; Rusch, 1994). In other words, networks seem to support a culture conducive to change that is seldom found within formal school systems.

The reported benefits of networking as a change strategy have led to a proliferation of external and informal alliances, all committed to changing one school at a time. Networks increasingly are the recipients of substantive federal, state and private grant funds dedicated to fundamental school change. Some funding agencies hold the view that these productive cultures of collaboration will eventually permeate the formal district systems in which network members work and, ultimately, lead to excellent school systems. Keedy (1994) actually predicted a power shift in education because of national coalitions and networks. He maintained that, "school sites and national coalitions likely will be where the action is during the next 10 years. . . . .Central offices will be downsized --a battleground will emerge over decision-making as decentralization increases and coalitions influence local site activities" (p. 108). Noting that local districts are often fragmented and replete with competing self-interest groups, Keedy concluded that national coalitions and networks will provide a more connected and integrated approach to school reform and essentially dominate the local and state level reform scene. To some degree, these predictions have been already been operationalized. As states developed plans for the distribution of Goals 2000 monies, RFP's

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frequently included a requirement for network collaboration.[1] Currently, the RFP for the Porter-Obey-funding requires applicants to be connected to one of 14 national design models for restructuring, many supported by networks and coalitions. Another example can be found in New Jersey where districts connected to the Abbott decision on school funding are being directed by the State Department of Education to pick from a select group of national restructuring models, again many supported by networks and coalitions. But little is known about how the cultures of restructuring networks actually affect the cultures of school systems. In fact, Hargreaves observed that "while we have learned a lot about how to create exceptional islands of improvement, we know less about how to construct archipelagoes and still less about how to build whole continents of successful changes" (Hargreaves, Earl & Ryan, p. 165).

I believe that Hargreaves' observation is accurate, and posit that his view applies to restructuring networks as well. The research reported in this paper emanated from the discovery of a new "island" in northwest Ohio called the Pathfinder Network. The group formed, like most restructuring networks, with a group of likeminded educators coming together to address new and complex problems of schooling[2]. As the group evolved over 3 years, Network principals and teachers often complained that the journey to new kinds of schools, new kinds of learning environments, and new kinds of instructional behaviors was filled with peril in their school districts. Members engaged in lots of muttering about the challenges of changing systems within traditional bureaucratic structures. Some found that their hard work was negated by superintendents, while others experienced denigration, avoidance, or pressure from professional colleagues, But the most common complaint from the principals was about *silence*, that few colleagues within their own systems wanted to talk about innovative practices, to collaborate in the competition for grant money, or to compare approaches to teaching and learning. While Pathfinder principals and teachers eagerly engaged in building new working relationships, initiating action research, and dialoguing about learning, they were very blunt that this same conversation could not and would not take place among schools within their systems. Eventually, the network members began to define themselves as an *invented school system.* Because the invented system provided an "island-like" environment for emerging ideas and actions, some Pathfinders began to exhibit more

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[11] Like many states, Ohio created a catalog of "acceptable" restructuring designs for districts to follow if they wanted state grant monies. The majority of the models were connected to national coalitions and networks.

[22] While the schools reported on in this study came together independent of any state initiative, their work eventually was supported by a state Goals 2000 RFP for School-University partnerships. State and federal officials followed the work of the 24 grant recipients in Ohio, attending more closely to the partnership and network concepts than the actual content of the work.

allegiance to the network than to their formal system. As the primary facilitator of the network, I valued the allegiance, but as a former school administrator I realized that this informal alliance was not creating archipelagoes and was disrupting professional loyalty to Pathfinder members' school systems. I was troubled by the perception that the network was the only place Pathfinder members could find "people who understand what I am talking about." Why did Pathfinder members believe that no one in their school systems could or would engage in the same organizational development work that supported network members' learning? What inhibited these risk-taking, inquiring, and reflective principals from enacting their espoused values among their district peers? These questions and the unintended consequence of the Pathfinder Network relationship, led to a study that probed how central office administrators, board members, and principal colleagues conceptualized systemic change. The study sought to understand how cultural changes at a single school site (network member) affected or didn't affect the culture within the system. The study unmasked the consequences of dichotomous values in action, namely how the value for collaboration within a network collided with a mythology of competition within the school systems. While most collisions are accompanied by a fair amount of noise, this encounter was permeated by a silence that sealed off the potential for excellence both among individuals and within systems The paper begins with a review of the current literature on restructuring networks. Next, I examine the concept of organizational silence, using Chris Argyris' work on organizational defense routines (Argyris, 1990; 1993). After introducing the research process, I elaborate on the findings that unveiled the theories in action that mediated a culture of silence among educators. I conclude this paper with a critical analysis of changes supported by networks external to school systems.

Theoretical Perspectives

Most individuals and systems, according to Argyris (1986; 1990; 1993) behave using theories which limit the capacity of the organization achieve excellence. Based on extensive research, Argyris argues that most members of organizations use what he calls Model I theories or single loop learning in order to 1) control events to achieve an intended purpose, 2) maximize winning and minimize losing, 3) make certain that emotions, particularly negative feelings, do not surface, and 4) to choose behaviors that appear to be rational. An example of Model I theory or single loop learning in use might be school systems where a stated goal *that all children will achieve high standards*, is supported by teaching and learning processes that continue to reflect that *only some children are expected to achieve high standards*. If student outcomes suggest the goals are not authentic, members of the organization control the flow of data about achievement, making sure that positive data

is emphasized. Disparate achievement data is usually explained by pointing to forces outside of the system. Efforts to support achievement tend to be project-based, such as teaching students test-taking skills, offering rewards for student attendance and score improvements, and increasing expenditures on test practice booklets. If great variations in student achievement continue to appear among individual schools, new kinds of projects are sought out and adopted. The discrepancy is never openly discussed because the discussion itself might cause conflict and embarrassment. Argyris calls the silence an organizational defense routine that self-seals the system from learning (Argyris, 1993).

The literature on organizational defensive routines is very useful for exploring the emergent dynamics in school districts where individual school sites belong to restructuring networks. Argyris (1993) contends that defensive routines are both practice and policy, they are often rewarded, and they effectively protect the system from learning or from taking corrective action. The behaviors are particularly visible when there is the potential for embarrassment or threat. In fact, he argues that organizational defensive routines actually "reduce performance, commitment, and concern for the organization" and prevent people from finding the underlying causes of the embarrassment or threat (Argyris, 1990, p. 45). The most prominent characteristics of defensive reasoning include undefined and untested attributions or evaluations, advocacy of a viewpoint with little interest in inquiry, and attributions that blame external forces. In essence, the resulting silence sustains a functionalist view of education and, according to critical theorists, sustains the myths and distortions that construct the dominant culture within our educational organizations (Giroux, 1988; Smythe, 1989).

In his research on organizational defensive routines, Argyris found that the practices result in competitiveness and rivalry, mistrust, hardened positions, and neglected [illegible] (Argyris, 1986; 1990; 1993). The most powerful result is that all of these elements become undiscussible. In fact, the undiscussability is undiscussible! After reviewing literature related to school change, Argyris concluded that that educators are frequently "unaware of how skillfully they create defensive routines, how skillfully they compound them when they try to reduce them, how skillfully they blame others, and how skillfully they deny all of the above" (Argyris, 1993, pp. 30-31).

The only successful way to break defensive routines, according to Argyris, is to find ways to discuss them. The discussion must include use of valid information, the practice of reflective inquiry, a continuous effort to detect and correct errors, and a purposeful testing of theories in action. Argyris' approach is comparable to the call from critical theorists for "participatory form of learning as the way to unfreeze existing power relationships" (Smythe, 1989 p. 200) or "self criticism and critique of the taken-for-

grantedness of the actual contexts of teaching" (Shor & Friere, 1987 p. 99). In other words, organizational learning is dependent on members developing strategies to break the silence, to communicate honestly and to give feedback about issues they would prefer not to discuss. In practice, this work overcomes defensive reasoning and leads to productive reasoning. According to current literature, the fundamental values and behaviors that support productive reasoning are at the core of successful restructuring networks.

Networks as Learning Communities

Networks, external to school systems, typically come together among like-minded individuals with a shared interest, often nurturing an organizational culture based on open communication. The cohesion that develops among network members seems to come from the experience of being part of a learning community or a learning organization, a term popularized by Senge (1992). In fact, when some of the first research on networks was reported, the term *learning communities* defined the nature of their work (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996). The values and behaviors that foster a learning organization are said to include: 1) a change process that recognizes the interdependence of the system; 2) persistent open discussion of the undiscussables; and 3) a working relationship that operates with a value for mutual influence (Beer and Eisenstat, 1996). After extensive research on interventions designed to promote increased organizational learning, Beer and Eisenstat determined that the most important feature of a learning organization was open discussion. They noted:

> Lacking the capacity for open discussion, top teams can not arrive at a shared diagnosis. Lacking a shared diagnosis, they cannot craft a common vision of the future state or a coherent intervention strategy that successfully negotiates the difficult problems organizational change poses. (p. 599-600).

The researchers also concluded that effective learning relationships in organizations had to include "learning how to receive feedback without loss of self-esteem, how to collaborate without feeling out of control, and how to own up to weakness without feeling incompetent" (Beer & Eisenstat, 1996, p, 617).

The fundamental purpose of most restructuring networks is to build a collaborative culture, a learning atmosphere where people share resources and expertise, provide each other with moral support, and work on building trust so they can critique their work honestly in order to solve complex problems. In fact, networks are often described as safe havens for change agents. According to people who organize and/or study networks, an

environment that supports feedback allowed teachers and administrators to tackle complex problems, increased their access to expertise, focused more on central questions related to student outcomes, and frequently achieved enhanced teacher efficacy (Conley, 1993; Lieberman and Grolnick,1996; Mitchell & Rusch, 1995; Rusch, 1994). Lieberman and Grolnick (1996) found that the flexibility of network relationships was partcularly significant. They stated "Networks are a way of engaging school-based educators in directing their own learning; allowing them to sidestep the limitations of institutional roles, hierarchies, and geographic locations" (p. 8). But, despite the absense of the traditional organizational structures, researchers also noted that in successful relationships, network members had to confront all the standard organizational issues to develop a common language, power relationships, and ideological assumptions (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992).

Network members pointed out the importance of open and honest professional talk to sustain the cohesion within the group. Truth and trust was reported to increase the capacity of individuals to confront complex issues with increasing complex lenses. In their review of 16 networks, Lieberman and Grolnick (1996) noted that as collaborative efforts increased, "participants develop more complex views of the issues they are concerned about, . . . take different perspective and different ways of knowing into account" (p. 16). Visible increases in personal and general efficacy of teachers related to changing classrooms and schools were also reported by some researchers. The results were described as high energy and altruistic work habits within local sites (Conley, 1993; Mitchell & Rusch, 1994). Observing that "members develop relationships that bind them more closely to the goals of the larger group", Lieberman and Grolnick also noted that "a network is built on its relationships" (1996, p. 16). It seems likely that members of networks who experience educational work governed by this set of values would form a powerful bond. One principal bluntly expressed the importance of the network for her work, saying "That's why we join groups like these; we don't have and can't have conversations in our own districts that support this kind of work" (Rusch, 1998, p. 17).

The increased sense of community experienced by these network members, coupled with the network support for local site change, can lead to disrupting the organizational culture within the member's school system. Lieberman and McLaughlin (1995) found that as like-minded members of a network created a culture of change, they often adopted new language, new ideology, and different power relationships among themselves and within their schools. These new cultural elements sometimes changed relationships within the network members' school district. For example, several members of the Southern Maine

Partnership, a consortium of 26 school districts, found themselves marginalized within their own district. A member of the network described the growing dilemma:

> Perhaps, then, we should not have been surprised when some teacher from other elementary schools in the district referred to us as the "country club" school. While we did not see ourselves as very different from our colleagues throughout the district, the evidence of our activity--the grants and local publicity--seemed to set us apart, to distance us from colleagues in other schools. Perhaps because of our insider's perspective we did not realize that our norms had changed, that we were indeed different. Somehow, 'different' seemed to suggest to some others that we had become 'superior' or 'arrogant'. (Goldberry, 1995, p. 151)

The experience of Maine teachers was not unique. Some network members reported that marginalization within their district seemed to increase when their network-based activities begin to visibly affect learners in local schools. Mitchell and Rusch (1995) found that non-network administrators and teachers in the district often credited the changes in achievement to the extra resources from the network rather than changes in teacher philosophy or pedagogy.

Systems as Learning Communities

So how do network members transfer their knowledge of and skills in organizational learning to their systems? The silence on the subject is almost as startling as the reported silence within the school systems. Some network members reported a silence that corresponded to hostility from their system. In reporting the involvement in the Southern Maine Partnership, Goldberry (1995) noted that the staff at one school did not understand the systemic implications of their changes until they began to work with the district special education director and then the excitement about changes within their school was tempered by resistance from special education teachers outside of their school. While the network had helped teachers clarify their beliefs about teaching and supported the enactment of a common vision at their school, the teachers acknowledged their own role in perpetuating the hostile silence within the district. They were not "listening carefully to the concerns of the resisters outside the school" (p. 146). Despite the lack of system acceptance of their work, the Maine Partnership school planned to forge ahead and become a professional development school, hoping that would "provide the opportunity for more cross-district interaction" (p. 155).

While much can be found about networks and individual school sites as learning communities, little has been written about efforts to restructure an entire school system or to transfer the network culture to school systems. Information about the system, if available, is introduced as advice, as an incidental factor, or as a lurking bureaucratic barrier. In their study of large urban high schools attempting restructuring, Louis and Miles (1990) provided some advice. Concluding that " school improvement is most successful when schools and their districts are actively engaged with each other" (p. 291), the authors stressed that district office personnel must forego traditional power relationships and support the development of *working relationships*: "getting organizational development technical help here is useful" (Louis & Miles, 1990, p. 291). Other researchers advised central office administrators themselves to experience "concurrent restructuring efforts" (Bogotch and Brooks 1994, p. 13). Yet, in their study of urban districts, these researcher found a silence that corresponded to ignorance; central offices were minimally involved in the innovations and 46% of the administrators had no knowledge of the changes taking place.

Lack of central involvement sometimes was compounded by a lack of effort on the part of the restructuring school to break the silence by communicating their new learning experiences. Tewel (1995) critiqued his own silence at Franklin Lane High School, admitting he consciously bypassed the central office administrators as he led a major restructuring effort because of his previous experiences with innovation. He said, "Frankly, in a major mistake on my part, I never let them forget it [board's past history with the school]. I should have done the opposite and tried to draw central officials into the process" (Tewel, 1995, p. 65). The potential oppression of lurking bureaucratic structures was found in reports on national network efforts which included cautionary notes about community, district, and external factors that tend to inhibit successful project implementation, rather than facilitate it (Anderson & Shirley, 1995). In a statewide study of Project Re:Learning the authors noted the implicit power of a central office to pull the rug out from under the project at any time. Darling-Hammond, who coordinates several national networks, also pointed out the need for new policy that "helps schools find ways to remove bureaucratic structures that get in the way of serious dialogue and joint problem solving" (Darling-Hammond, 1995, p. 170).

The dilemmas are clear. The professional learning relationships fostered by networks are a disruptive element to the local district culture and they are disruptive to membership in the culture. Essentially an informal alliance, external to the member's formal district, supports the development of new language, new ideology, new communication and group skills, and different power relationships than members typically

experienced within their school districts. Researchers agreed that network members gain skills in group process and communication and increase their ability to communicate honestly and give feedback within the network. But I found no evidence in the literature that the network members' new skills have the same effect on the ideology, the communication patterns, and the power relationships in their school systems.

Research Process

This study emerged from the dilemmas of Pathfinder Network principals from 7 separate districts representing urban, suburban, and rural environments with sizes ranging from 1500 -37,000 students. The Pathfinder Network was organized around the concepts of a learning community with agreed-to values for cross-system learning, mutual influence and egalitarianism. The Pathfinder relationship was fostered by members actively engaging in learning with each other. All members participated in extensive training and practice in organizational development processes drawing from the long-standing work of Kurt Lewin, Richard Schmuck, Chris Argyris, Marvin Weisbord, and Peter Senge so that research conducted at school sites could be used for productive dialogue about teaching and learning. Educational administration professors trained and worked alongside a school-based team of action researchers at each site so teachers and administrators had the capacity to examine the effects of their restructuring decisions on learner outcomes. A study on organization efficacy was initiated to look at the relationship of belief systems that governed teachers' instructional decisions and belief systems that governed principals' leadership decisions. The study provided local site and cross-system data for reflecting on mental models of teaching, learning, and schooling. Actions within the network and within local schools became increasingly data driven and the results of formal research and action research led to highly complex discussions about individual classroom practices. In other words, many of the traditional 'undiscussables' were becoming a standard and important part of the work in Pathfinder Schools. One principal described the results of link between the organizational development work and use of research data for planning:

> It's amazing. The staff is getting very creative at finding more time to work together and they're doing things I could never have asked them to do. They really listen to each other and they listen to what they say. As a result, everyone on the staff now feels everyone has value and worth and the kids are going home everyday with their tongues hanging out!

Another principal talked about the increasing efficacy within his school as members of the school engaged in more authentic discussions of teaching and learning:

> I've become open enough with the staff to highlight their disagreements and we go from there. What I hear now is 'We can do anything. Just show me and I'll do it'. They're now beginning to see how early childhood instruction is linked to advanced grade proficiency test.

While each school was at varying stages with their restructuring efforts, all were exhibiting cultural changes similar to the factors described by Darling Hammond (1996) in the NCREST studies. Each site showed clear evidence of shared decision-making, deeper discourse about teaching and learning, increased teacher collaboration, and increased data collection and use--all focused on student learning. Much to the surprise of many teachers and administrators, powerful and productive dialogue emerged among people who a year earlier had described their relationship as filled with fear and skepticism. One teacher described the change in atmosphere:

> We usually responded with 'I'll never be able to do this; this is overwhelming. I've always done it this way and I want to keep doing it.' Now I see resistance broken down. Doors are open, people are helping one another, trying out ideas, sharing ideas. There's a whole new feeling of belonging here.

The sense of belonging that emerged, however, was not a common experience once Pathfinder principals interacted outside the network or outside their respective schools. While the activities of the network were designed to supported profound changes in individual schools, network member principals experienced increased professional isolation, a sense of loss, and lack of support for the hard work within their own school system (Rusch, 1998). Data gathered from transcripts of network training sessions showed that principals found their experiences difficult to share with colleagues, that their success seemed to create tension and isolation from the other members of their administrative teams. In other words, the cross-system learning community that appeared to work in an unofficial alliance like the Pathfinders seemed to have little transportability to the network members' school systems.

To gain understanding of this emergent dynamic, a focus group dialogue was initiated with network principals, selected district level administrators, university faculty and board members. Participants wrote individual responses to a set of semi-structure questions,

used their responses for a small group dialogue, and presented an overview to the larger group for discussion. Research assistants recorded table dialogue in order to capture nuances of the discussion. The large group discussion was also recorded. Data from the dialogue were then used to develop questions for a semi-structured interview with superintendents, board members, central office personnel, and principal colleagues in all districts. Data from 21 interviews, each lasting at least an hour, were analyzed using Argyris' Model I conceptual framework to capture the "theories in use" that might affect organizational learning. Additional analyses using the same Arygris model were then conducted on the training transcript data to locate the network members' theories in use that contributed to the silence in the district. After key theories were identified and coded, the data were reread to test the "theories in use" by identifying the defensive behaviors that supported the theories. This reading revealed the Model I theories of Pathfinder Network members. Finally, a constant comparative process was used with the data to determine the robustness of the defensive behaviors that seemed to perpetuate the organizational silence.

Findings and Discussion

The data unmasked the theories of organizational learning embedded within the culture of the local school systems and the defensive behaviors that district members used to sustain a inert culture. These theories in action, practiced by both network and non-network members, silenced any talk about change that had the potential to foster excellence within the school districts. The data added new insights to Hargreaves' perspective on islands and archipelagoes (Hargreaves et al., 1996). The present culture of the districts in this study revealed that there is a comfort with islands and minimal knowledge or will to develop archipelagoes.

District Theories in Use

Essentially, district level administrators and board members, in attempts to respect local context, appeared to govern as though no part of the system was connected to or articulated with other parts of the system. Believing that talk about change in a single district site would encourage competition or breed jealously, no formal discussions about specific changes took place at the central level in any of the 7 districts . Data showed the following operating theories for the silence:

Competition Theory

If we examine success in individual schools too closely, it will lead to jealousy and competition that would damage the group.

Parenting Theory

Sibling (intra-school) rivalry is natural and unavoidable.

Common Goal Theory

All schools are not the same but all schools should be almost the same.

Communication Theory

Network schools are invitational and sharing but we don't share in this district. Informal communication is good enough.

Competition Theory

Concerns for "competition" or "highlighting" of individual schools was the most prominent reason cited among all the interviewees for not sharing stories about change in individual school sites. The fear of competition actually bounded communication about change among district level administrators and board members. Central level administrators frequently used the image of the "pedestal" to explain their reasoning. As one superintendent talked about the success of 2 schools in the network, he noted,

> I try not to set Fairwood and Southern on a pedestal as what we are trying to work toward because I think when you do that, you damage the individual personal dynamics of the buildings. Buildings are like individuals; they've got their own personality and you've got to let them move forward and develop in their own way.

A central office member stressed the importance of "not trying to compete one school against the other. If you start doing that pretty soon you create negative dynamics between the two." The negative dynamics were described by a school board member who noted,

> Some teachers in the other buildings think the Pathfinder school teachers think that they are better than the teachers in the other schools.... [Pathfinder] teachers aren't walking through town saying, 'I'm the best.' Pathfinder teachers are the best. But other teachers perceive they feel that way. The other teachers think they are.

A central office administrator felt the view of Pathfinder teachers as smug and self satisfied was a direct result of jealousy and competition felt by the other teachers in the district. Another central office member explained how competition emerged in her small district

noting that she had to be careful because the informal communication links would quickly go to work if she showed a preference for one building. A curriculum director elaborated on the dilemmas of the perceived competition:

> We have competition here but no one is going to admit that Merriman is better. For instance I just got the [state achievement tests] back. There's a second grade teacher who has every student in her class at an advanced proficiency in mathematics. I think that's absolutely stupendous. Now I can't tell the whole district--I can't make an official announcement that this happened. . . .If I were an elementary principal I'd be over at Merriman all the time. I'd be asking, 'What are you doing? How are you doing it?' Personally, I don't think anyone wants to emulate Merriman. And I think that is very sad.

Parenting Theory

Equally prominent in the interviews was the theory that individual school were like children and the central role included being parental. Both administrators and board members framed their talk about competition using comparatives of sibling rivalry. Drawing on his experience raising children, one superintendent said,

> There's always going to be some belief that somebody's more favored or less favored or has this or has that. There's always a pecking order, there's always somebody who thinks they're better, not as good, or whatever. I don't know if it's human nature or what. I learned a long time ago when raising my children that the main thing is you just provide the same resources to everybody and encourage and support, but its still up to their initiative

In several districts, dialogue about innovations was actually discouraged in order to "protect" some schools from what superintendents viewed as potential " negative dynamics" that emerged from sibling rivalry. One superintendent noted:

> I think the caution would be not to put any building or situation on a pedestal and say, you know, here...you should [do this], sort of like raising children, you know. You could all be like Susie; we'd all be happy. You don't want to create a situation like that. It's a situation where you praise good behavior and you try to work with where there are problems with those people that have problems and try to work through that.

One board member talked about the "detriment" of giving recognition or attention to successful schools which another superintendent described as watching out "that you don't develop some jealousies and hostilities among [the schools] because someone is receiving more recognition or more publicity or more money or whatever".

Common Goal Theory

The application of parenting roles to district work was also visible when interviewees were asked about the possibilities of using individual site restructuring experiences as a district case study for learning about the complexities of change. Twenty out of 21 interviewees responded with some discussion about the importance of all schools being treated the same and/or the board and community expectations that all schools should be the same. A curriculum director was convinced that her "board members want everything to be exactly the same." Not knowing how to effect this expectation of "look alike," some central administrators talked about "encouraging" principals to aspire to state innovation grants that supported the network schools. Principals receiving this encouragement described it as "pressure" to be like the network schools. Keeping balance among the schools was of interest to the interviewees in all districts. In one superintendent's view:

> If recognition or attention is paid to one school, good or bad I think it can have detrimental results. It's a matter of trying to create an atmosphere that everybody can be successful in. . . We think it's okay to do things differently. At the same time we don't want to get things too far off balance or too far away.

The board members were clear about the need for balance and equity of attention, believing that the community wanted schools to be the same. Out of the 7 districts, only one was engaged in a singular effort to restructure the schools. Based on expectations from the board and the superintendent that all schools needed to be alike, everyone was expected to apply Gardners' theories of Multiple Intellegences to their curriculum and instruction. While both formal and informal communication was supporting the districtwide restructuring effort, maintaining the expected equity was somewhat deceptive according to one administrator, "You have to be sure that everybody is at least perceived as moving along a positive direction."

Communication Theory

The lack of formal and directed talk about change and/or specific innovation plans was striking in the data. Every administrator and board member interviewed was clear about the importance of "talk" to enhance knowledge about restructuring issues, but every district relied on informal communication structures to know what was happening in network schools. As one principal noted, "It's so strange for our people to share. Sharing is not in our vocabulary."

Knowledge at the central level about actual restructuring work in Pathfinder schools was gleaned mainly from information that might "bubble up." Some superintendents noted that frequently their knowledge about specific changes came from teachers who were dissatisfied with innovations, who "would go underground and complain by calling me and board members." Another superintendent described an elaborate process to keep board members educated about innovations, but building administrators described communication as "more informal and only with certain players." In one district, the curriculum director was blunt: "We never talk about philosophy or change; we talk managerial things."

Invitations for cross-district learning were not lacking. Curriculum directors and assistant superintendents talked about network principals "inviting the whole district" to participate in special in-service events, as being "open about sharing with everyone." But, as one curriculum specialist noted, "I'm the only one who shows up." Another principal, when describing the interaction with network schools, said, "We're really an island here."

A value for respectful avoidance appeared to govern the communication theories of most respondents. One superintendent explained his viewpoint: "As long as you're keeping people involved, you're not going to have many problems. Respect the fact that everyone can do it differently. It's okay to have competing values." Central office administrators and board members explained the lack of organized discussions about change with a variety of tacit assumptions about change. Several indicated that any change would be fine as long as the teachers and principal were excited about it. Still other administrators and board members in Pathfinder systems operated with a theory that "there is no right way" to improve learning. One superintendent said, "Kids are amazingly resilient. Kids are learning in traditional methods." A board member in the same district confirmed that theory in action: "It doesn't matter what kind of a classroom a teacher has--desks in a row, workbooks, as long as she can convey her excitement and enthusiasm for education. Her students are going to pick that up and they're going to learn." Another board member justified the lack of discussion about change by stating, "Just because this is working in one school, we can't expect others to do it until staff buys into it. I am not sure that any one way is the right way. I want an option of what is available to my child." One

board member put it this way: "The biggest challenge is not to let teachers feel they are doing something wrong if they don't want to change."

No district in this study engaged in any formal *case study* examination about changing schools. Even in the district with a common restructuring agenda, there was no evidence of a formal learning process about how changes were progressing in a variety of contexts. While all 21 interviewees expressed responsibility and concern for developing dynamic and excellent systems, the fear of competition, jealousy, variation, and open communication reinforced the isolation among principals and between principals and central office administrators. When asked about background and skills to conduct a cross-school discussion about change, central office administrators responded as one superintendent who said "Nothing in my training or background prepared me to do that." Superintendents openly admitted a lack of knowledge and skills for conducting complex discussions about issues related to teaching and learning among administrators.

The fear of competition also became a standard defense mechanism that inhibited discussion of critical values, such as children's equal opportunity to learn. The resulting silencing of people and ideas repressed a viable intellectual source that potentially could solve complex educational problems. Unfortunately, the network principals who were actively engaged in formal and substantive talk about these complex educational problems were not engaging with their peers in the same conversation and exhibited some of the same defensive behaviors to support their theories in use.

Network Members Theories in Action

The data strongly supported the proposition that networks actually provide another "island" for educators interested in change. On the network "island" an entirely new set of values and behaviors emerged that support organizational learning among the network members and within their own school sites. To gain insights into their theories in use related to student learning, the network members persistently observed and discussed what was happening, how it was happening, and examined the underlying behaviors and beliefs that supported or inhibited change. Consequently, the working relationship of the group was built around a value for interrogating each other's stories of change. However, when the network principals experienced little support for cross-system discussion of their stories of change, they operationalized a set of theories to explain the silence in their own system. The theories included:

Motivation Theory

Members of my district do not want to learn.

Isolation Theory

Actual school improvement evokes rejection, marginalization, and isolation.

Theory of Care and Concern

School district colleagues do not have the same level of concern, do not want to share, and do not feel responsible for issues related to teaching and learning.

Motivation Theory

As noted earlier, Pathfinder principals were very clear about their motivation to join a network: they couldn't have conversations in their own districts that supported their work. One principal referred to the Pathfinders as "my safety net." A key focus of Pathfinder learning was on efficacy: the inherent beliefs about our personal and general capacity to affect change. To support the development of an efficacious school, Pathfinders also worked hard on the group process skills that helped their school community navigate complex problems.

Pathfinder principals experienced a high degree of success in their own schools, engaging their teachers in powerful work related to teaching and learning, developing capacity among reluctant staff members, and reawakening the professional energy of long-term teachers. Yet, as principals were confronted with the application of group process strategies to their own systems, their responses paralleled their early descriptions of resistant teachers at their sites. They described their colleagues as "too old and worn out to learn", as "too concerned about protecting their own turf" to engage in productive dialogue, and as "too selfish" to care about progress in the whole system. One principal with high poverty population noted that, "those other [schools] don't care about what happens to our kids; they're just glad we have them and they don't."

Another principal, determined to "make the system understand", convinced a central office administrator to conduct the efficacy study districtwide and when the results showed glaring loopholes in general efficacy across the schools, she began new efforts to talk with middle school teachers and administrators. When there didn't seem to be any interest in her data after the first conversation, she became convinced that her colleagues did not want to learn and shelved the data. Yet in her own school, this same principal was clear that patience and time were the keys to engaging teachers in innovative practices.

Theory of Isolation

Within 6 of 7 Pathfinder systems, principals described a sense of isolation. Colleagues did not visit their schools nor did they inquire at district meetings about the progress the schools were making with their reforms. One Pathfinder principal described her location in the district culture as an "island". The data included Network principals describing themselves as a "thorn in the side", as "not always being easy to be around because [they] persistently asked everyone to think hard about hard things", as "doing things that no one really understands." A principal who defined herself frequently as "not fitting in" spoke about the lack of real dialogue about value positions that governed policy development and decisions about practice in the district. In her view, "Administrative meetings are not fun. We do a terrible job of working with data. We have no safe way of talking about complex issues so we just don't say anything". Visibly angry about the lack of interest in her work, she consciously stopped sharing information with her colleagues and eventually stopped attending most district meetings.

During Pathfinder meetings, these principals thrived in the sharing environment. Each principal actively sought conversation, deep dialogue, and reflective inquiry--with their like-minded colleagues in the network. Some of the video data include an expressive tone that might be described as a badge of honor. While the principals felt marginalized among their peers, individuals were clear that what they were marginalized for had professional value and meaning and their Pathfinder colleagues reinforced the rightness of their philosophical positions. To some degree, the Pathfinder *island* was viewed as a privilaged position, a place where others understood their unique work. "I can talk to them," one principal noted; "I couldn't talk to my group [peers in district]."

Within their own buildings these principals engaged in complex group process work with their staff in order to create an inclusive culture. They worked hard to move from islands to archipelagoes, believing that innovations would not be sustained unless they were successful at breaking down the traditional isolation of classrooms, of departments, of grade levels, and of special interests. Yet, when interrogated about the application of these same group process strategies to their district work, Pathfinder principals were less sure that an inclusive culture was possible. Principals defended their reluctance by pointing out the importance of the likemindedness: "The difference is we all started out together and are really at the same level." one principal noted. Another added to the thought by pointing out the difference in levels of knowledge about change, stating, "I can't go back. The other principals in my district are all at different levels about this stuff. I can't go back to 'not knowing'." Despite gaining understanding from the Pathfinder research about the relationship between their efficacy and their teachers' efficacy, these

principals had difficulty transferring the same understandings to their district colleagues in ways that might have modified the marginalization and isolation.

Theory of Care and Concern

The pain of district disinterest among Pathfinder principals was very powerful. One principal said, "I've never been asked what is going on in my school at a district meeting. The other administrators in this district are not even aware that sharing is not going on. I'm not sure that they even know it is an issue". Another Pathfinder principal was equally convinced that district administrators had no interest in the transformations taking place at her school. During her yearly evaluation, she was told that flat test scores were a greater area of concern than faculty development. Her new knowledge about organizational learning seemed useless in the face of district standards of practice. The power for district level authorities to determine what was important overshadowed the visible benefits students were receiving from teachers who worked collaboratively. In her words, "Without the support of the Pathfinder group, I'd just have folded and given up. Developing a professional group of adult learners is hard work and no one understood or appreciated what I was doing". Another network principal reported, "I'd trust these people with anything; they'd always tell me the truth." (Ibid., p. 16)

Some Pathfinder schools began to experience dramatic changes in test scores, received increasing amounts of grant support, and being invited to present at state and regional conferences. For the most part, these public accolades were not matched by district interest in their work. In some cases, efforts to engage feeder pattern schools in discussions that would articulate learning experiences for students were thwarted by both the union and district office administrators. When asked what a good conversation might be, the network principals wanted to talk about the complexities of engaging staff members in new ideas, about new ways to gather good information about students as they progressed through the system, and about strategies for articulating learning between levels in the system. Even when Pathfinders were able to find an audience for their work, the substance of the conversation, if it existed at all, revolved around the content of the change, not the context of change itself. One principal spoke sadly of the lack of acknowledgment or interest in her staff's achievements: "I've never asked why no one comments. Maybe I'm afraid of the answers."

Pathfinder principals, to some degree, were living out a competing set of values that complicated their work. While they acted on theories within the network and in their own schools that matched Arygris' notion of Model II reasoning, the principals still held onto defensive behaviors that that locked them into Model I reasoning within their system. As

these principals described their colleagues and the system relationships, their words revealed untested attributions, mistrust, and a sense of rivalry and jealousy. Even though these principal were increasingly skilled at facilitating group agreements, at engaging in reflective inquiry, at challenging untested assumptions, and at unpacking defensive behaviors with each other and within their own schools, the data showed how the embedded culture of competition at the system level affected these principals and reinforced their Model I reasoning. The Pathfinder principals were convinced that the same complex problems they were solving within the network and in their buildings were undiscussible at the central level in the system.

Excellence Thwarted

The defensive behaviors that limit organizational learning in the Pathfinder members' systems are eminently clear. The fear of promoting competition among district schools or holding one school up for recognition was viewed as potentially embarrassing or threatening, so discussions never took place. Even though the work in Pathfinder schools was leading to dramatic changes in student achievement, visibly different professional norms among teachers, and increasing accolades from parents and statewide professionals, there was no clear district effort to find out how these changes were working. The fear of "sibling rivalry" and the fear of competition literally froze the systems into a state of mediocrity. It seemed that the longer people had experienced the sealing effects of the defensive behaviors , the more likely they were to be "passive, fatalistic, dependent, adaptive to almost whatever occurs (Fay, 1987, p. 106). By working to keep every school the same, or at least creating a perception of sameness, excellence was a sporadic and very illusive concept for these 7 school districts. While Friere uses the culture of the peasant to define his ideas, his observations seem to fit the beliefs of most educators interviewed for this study: "they do not see that their situation can be different from what it is; they do not perceive that they have a least the potential power to intervene in the social world and transform it (Fay, 1987, p. 106).

Argyris (1993) asserts that organizations that focus on competition and work to inhibit discussions of complex issues are engaging in "single loop learning." He predicts that the most frequent result of these actions is misunderstanding, defensiveness, and self fulfilling behaviors, which protect members from embarrassment or threat but at the same time prevents organizational learning, organizational growth, and organizational commitment. Beer and Eisenstat (1996) concur, noting that:

> Lacking the capacity for open discussion, top teams can not arrive at a shared diagnosis. Lacking a shared diagnosis, they cannot craft a common vision of the future state or a coherent intervention strategy that successfully negotiates the difficult problems organizational change poses. In short, the low level of competence in most organizations in fashioning an inquiring dialogue inhibits identifying root causes and developing fundamental systemic solutions" (p. 599-600).

The Pathfinder principals interpreted this behavior as a lack of responsibility for the progress of students through the system. The network principals also defined their colleagues as less committed to important issues related to teaching and learning. However, the criticism was coupled with a conscious decision not to openly confront the perceived lack of commitment. That discussion only took place among likeminded educators within the network.

When these results are examined through the lens of critical theory, we must ask, along with Giroux, "What accounts for the conditions that sustain an active refusal to know or to learn in the face of knowledge that may challenge the nature of domination itself" (1988, p. 116)? While the Pathfinder principals viewed the network as a social arrangment that matched their values for openness and complexity, questions about the benefits of sustaining silence within their own systems still remain unanswered. To what degree was the work of the network merely a form of personal resistance against the dominent culture of the system? Has the culture of silence within our systems become so oppressive that despite the personal satisfaction derived from a network experience, the language of possibility and the increased skills at achieiving empowerment is not enough to change the relations of power within the system?

Like most networks, the Pathfinder Network came to life among a group of educators committed to transforming education. Collectively these principals were not afraid to examine the beliefs and values that inhibited learning in their schools. Yet as this research progressed and the work of the Pathfinders increasingly addressed questions about transfer to the entire system, the depth of what Argyris calls "skilled incompetence" began to emerge. Using Friere's concepts of emancipatory processes, Fay (1987) suggests that we must work to understand how educators have co-constructed their own oppression. Defining a process for exposing the underlying beliefs and values that inform teaching decisions, Fay suggests that we explore how those beliefs and values came to be and are sustained over time, and how they can be changed. His suggestions are similar to the

processes Argyris (1990;1993) uses to engage people in Model II thinking, where their espoused values begin to match their values in action.

The good news is that the stated values of the Pathfinder Network supported asking the questions and engaging in the work to "lead through reflection to a change in the self-understandings of a group of people, and from there to an alteration of their social world (Fay, 1987, p. 108). Six months after these data were collected, the findings were used as an organizational development strategy to initiate a dialogue with all district administrators connected to the Pathfinder Network. While no official transcripts were kept of the conversation at that meeting, anecdotal data included expressions of relief that someone was finally willing to talk about the silence. Members of the group expressed a thirst for knowledge about what was going on in each others schools, a desire to know "how" Pathfinder principals were engaging teachers in new kinds of work, and a zeal for building new collaborative relationships. Currently, 2 of the 7 districts are replicating the Pathfinder learning process for their entire system.

Conclusion

This study brings to light some challenging aspects of restructuring networks. While these unofficial alliances result in support for the development of excellent schools, the systems which these schools are a part of often remain trapped in processes that do not support excellence. Reviews of literature on networks do not reveal any concerted efforts to develop system cultures that support the same values for interdependence and mutual influence. Most restructuring networks intend to modify the cultures of individualism, isolationism, and balkanization that fragment the work within our schools. But there seems to be little discussion on the part of network organizers and members about the re-creation of the individualism and the enhancement of the balkanization within school systems as single schools develop new kind of cultures within a system. As noted in this study, the Pathfinder Network was well on its way to becoming just another island and even though the work on the Pathfinder Island supported better learning environments for students, the deeply embedded culture of silence within the network member's systems was not being penetrated. While I might justify the benefits of the network to the Pathfinder principals, the reality is that students have to attend schools at all levels of the isolated and balkanized system.

As networks proliferate I would argue that policymakers who propose unofficial alliances to support complex change must examine the intended and unintended effects for the official district organizations. The sanctioning of an unofficial alliance with state or national funding has the potential to be viewed as tacit support for disruption of district

hierarchies, bureaucratic process, and cultural traditions for change. Local district administrators and board members, faced with a sense of disruption, typically go into defensive modes. While policymakers may legitimately view the district hierarchies as the primary barrier to changing schools, merely creating an island for change agents will not lead to excellence for students in our educational system.

The same issues must also be considered by network organizers. In their present form, most networks are merely reproducing the social relations that limit the growth and development of our current systems. Who benefits from a transformative process that only transforms schools outside their systems? Giroux argues that "social control serving the interests of freedom must function to empower" (1988, p. 183), but if the empowerment only benefits network members and network faciliators, how have we contributed to the development of emancipatory forms of schooling? While network members gain a sense of agency for intervening in their own schools, there is no evidence that archipelagos are resulting within and among schools in systems. The current discourse on networks does not include a critique of the political dimensions noted by Fay (1987) who suggests that exposing oppression can be a manipulative act. Noting that people always belong to multiple social networks, Fay asks whether liberation from oppression has to mean cutting ties with the systems that foster the oppression. Developing a culture that supports mutual learning and interdependence is feasible when working among like-minded educators. But if policymakers and funding agencies engaged in systemic change projects continue to ignore the complexities of organizational learning within formal school districts, what long-term benefit do networks actually have? Without that systemic commitment, networks are still engaged in single loop learning and may, in fact, be inhibiting the development of excellence within school systems.

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